

Mishlei 19-17

Charity – Reimbursement

Key Concepts

When Hashem created the world with all of its creatures He didn't just leave them to fend for themselves. He set up the cycle of nature whereby each creature would have access to the sustenance that it needed to survive. Each living creature is motivated by its built-in life force to obtain what Hashem has made available for it.

Mankind was designed to be part of this universal system and so people are instinctively driven to seek their own livelihood. However, human beings were also granted a unique power to participate in the global system of sustenance by performing acts of kindness. Any individual can be inspired to consciously meet the needs of another. That act of kindness conforms to the will of Hashem and reflects the kindness that He bestowed upon the world when he created it. Since human kindness is a conscious human act that conforms to the Divine will, Hashem deems it a great *mitzvah*.

Although a person who gives charity to the needy is doing a *mitzvah*, he is also participating in the global system of sustenance that Hashem has provided for all His creatures. Just as Hashem rewards every *mitzvah* He also recognizes the financial transaction by which the person has withdrawn money from his own account and has given it to another, acting as an agent of Hashem, and fulfilling His universal obligation. In effect Hashem has become a temporary borrower of that money to fulfill His own obligation for the needy person's sustenance. Hashem pays His debts and therefore can be relied upon to repay the loan. That repayment is in addition to the reward that a person should expect for the *mitzvah* of having done Hashem's will.

Exploring Mishlei

(יז) מְלוֹה ה' חוֹנֵן דָּל וְגִמְלוֹ יִשְׁלַם לוֹ:

(17) *One who gives charity to the poor is lending to Hashem,
and He will surely reimburse him.*

Mishlei summarizes the universal cycle of charity in the two parts of a brief proverb. The first part addresses the fact that each gift to the poor is effectively a loan to Hashem. The proverb thereby implies that the financial cost of the charitable gift will be repaid by Hashem. Hashem has assumed that cost because it is a means to fulfill His obligation to provide sustenance to every creature.

In the second part of the proverb, Mishlei addresses the fact that the person who gives charity is doing a *mitzvah*. Hashem is gratified that the person has done His will and has shown kindness.

Learning Mishlei

A person is effectively **lending to Hashem** — מְלוֹה ה'
when **he gives charity to the poor** — חוֹנֵן דָּל
and his reimbursement — וְגִמְלוֹ
Hashem **will surely pay** — יִשְׁלַם לוֹ

Additional Insights

[1] Besides receiving a reimbursement for the money he advanced in the form of charity, the kind man will receive a reward for having done the *mitzvah* of giving charity. (רבינו יונה)

[2] The *mitzvah* of kindness is effectively independent of its financial value. When a poor man is in desperate need of help, the quality of relief provided by the needed funds, given at the right time, has unlimited emotional and spiritual value. (שבט מיהודה)

[3] From another perspective, all human wealth is a temporary grant from Hashem, given to each man so that he can do *mitzvos*. The money the man gives to the poor is a repayment to Hashem of the loan Hashem made to him. (אבן עזרא)

[4] A righteous person cannot enjoy his own food if he knows of a poor man who is going hungry. In fact, he will not eat before he gives some of his food to the poor, for he considers it his own only after he has shared it. (רשר"ה)